

“Only Transformed People Can Follow Jesus”

Luke 22 31-34

A few years back my wife and I inherited a truck from her grandfather. It's a 1987 Ford Ranger, and it is one of those types of vehicles you can only get from someone from his generation. It was 20 years old but it only had 85,000 miles on it; it was perfectly maintained and garaged the whole time he had it. It looked almost new. He literally only drove it to pick up supplies for the local food bank.

After having it a few months, it began to run rough. Being a pretty self-reliant person, I began to try and fix the problem. Now the problem is when it comes to auto mechanics I am just good enough to get myself into trouble. First I gave it a regular tune-up: plugs, wires, etc., and that didn't fix the problem. Then I gave it a more extensive tune up: coil, distributor cap, etc., and that didn't work. About a month later I tried to start it and it wouldn't start at all. So I changed the fuel filter and fuel pump, but that didn't work. Several months later the kid at Schucks told me it might have water in the fuel. I drained the gas tank, and that didn't work. A few months and several bottles of starting fluid later I was able to get it started, but it ran 100 times worse than it did before. Also, the tail pipe would glow red. I read on the internet that it might be the catalytic converter. So I drilled a hole in the exhaust, and that didn't work. A few months later the mechanic guy from my church came and helped. He figured out within a few minutes that somewhere along the line I messed up the firing order on the distributor. He put it back how it is supposed to be. The truck fired right up and ran rough like it did when I started working on it. He told me it might be the CPU, which is the computer deal. So the next weekend I went to the junk yard (lots of 20-year-old Ford Rangers there) and got a gently used computer deal; it took about five minutes to put it in and the truck ran perfectly. This was a year and half later.

In a sense self-reliance is a good virtue to have. I think it is at the core of traditional American values. It's probably one of the key attributes of successful people. However when it comes to following Jesus it doesn't work. That is because when it comes to our relationship with God we are completely dependent on Him. Like me with auto mechanics, if we try to follow Jesus based on our own self-reliance, we actually can make things worse. If we are following Jesus, we are always in over our heads.

As we look at this passage, the heart of the problem with Peter's response to Jesus is that it is completely based on self-reliance. So if we cannot follow Jesus based on self-reliance, then how do we follow Him? The answer is **“We need to be transformed. We need to be changed; we cannot do it ourselves.”** As we look at this passage I want to look at from the perspective that **only transformed people can follow Jesus.** First I will discuss three common characteristics of followers of Jesus, as found in this passage and then I will flesh out (hopefully) this idea of what I mean by **“only transformed people can follow Jesus.”** The characteristics of followers of Jesus **are trials, God-given faith and humility**

I. Followers of Jesus go through trials.

³¹ *“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat,*

This passage comes after Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper and right before He and the disciples go to the Mount of Olives where Jesus would be arrested before His crucifixion. Just after the disciples argue about which of them is greatest, Jesus directs His conversation to Peter telling him that Satan wishes to have them sifted like wheat. The “you” here is second person plural, referring to all the disciples. That would be a you'all. Jesus specifically tells the disciples that they are in for a huge testing.

A. It's difficult to know exactly what Jesus was implying here; however this portrayal of Satan singling out people to be tested is not new. This phrasing is very similar to what happens in the book of Job where Satan is allowed by God to afflict Job to test his faithfulness. But also Jesus was led by the Spirit into the

wilderness to be tempted by the devil. It is not new that God would allow Satan to test believers, for even Jesus was tempted by him.

- B. One thing that is great about passages concerning Peter is that we can look at his epistles that he wrote 30 years later and see how his experiences depicted in the gospels and in the book of Acts formulate his teaching. I believe we get great insight from him in 1 Peter concerning this passage. In 1 Peter 4:12-13 Peter tells us not to be surprised by trials.

¹² *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.* ¹³ *But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*

We are not to be surprised by trials but instead rejoice as we share in Christ's sufferings as we will rejoice when His glory is revealed.

Peter also describes the activity of the devil toward believers in 1 Peter 5:8-9.

⁸ *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* ⁹ *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*

- C. Here we get a great description of how the devil works. He prowls like a lion looking for someone he can devour. This reminds me of a scene in Rocky Three where Rocky is in the gym working out for his first fight with Clubber Lang. Rocky has a carnival atmosphere; people are all around talking to him, taking pictures, and getting autographs. Clubber is by himself in a grungy gym with blood, sweat, and tears. When Rocky is in the ring sparring, a lady asks for a picture while kissing him, and Mickey, his old Irish manager, says, "Clubber ain't gonna kiss you; he's gonna kill you."

Peter is talking from his personal experience. He is not telling us that he's heard that the devil is like a devouring lion, but this is something that he knows. He is our adversary. Peter's instruction to us is to resist the devil knowing that we are not alone in our sufferings.

II Followers of Jesus must rely God-given faith

³² *but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.*"

The second characteristic of followers of Jesus is God-given faith. In verse 32 Jesus makes a promise to Peter. Jesus promises Peter faith. Where the "you" in the previous verse is in the second person plural, the "you" in verse 32 is singular to Peter.

- A. Equally important in this verse is what Jesus doesn't say. Jesus does not promise them lack of trials. He doesn't tell Peter that everything is okay and not to worry because He will keep him from that. Nor does He say Satan wants to sift you but it won't be as bad as it sounds. And He doesn't say Satan wants to sift you all but you have the faith you need to breeze through this, just make sure you try really hard.
- B. What Jesus does promise, though, is that Peter's faith will be tested to the limits, ultimately it will not fail. Peter is not going to look good, he's going to be humbled, but ultimately his faith will prevail.

- C. There may be many aspects to why the disciples are to be tested and why God allows that to happen. One purpose that Jesus indicates is that after Peter turns, he is to strengthen his brothers. Sometimes we as believers are to go through various trials possibly only to strengthen and encourage others.

III. Followers of Jesus must have humility.

³³ Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” ³⁴ Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”

The third characteristic of followers of Jesus is humility. Humility is always a tricky topic. It is really slippery when you try to grab it for yourself. The reason is because as soon as we think we have humility, we are actually proving otherwise. If we are lacking humility God is really creative in finding ways to give it to us. Also pinpointing exactly what humility is can be troublesome as well. Commonly I think we view humility as not thinking highly of oneself. One of the best ways I have heard it put, though, is that **“humility is not thinking less of ourselves but thinking of ourselves less.”** That is what it takes to follow Jesus. Peter is going too far both ways. He is thinking too much of himself but probably more importantly he is thinking of himself too much. He is still making his case as to why he is the greatest disciple. This lack of humility is at the heart of Peter’s response to Jesus. Peter doesn’t take what Jesus tells him too well. The funny thing is that Peter doesn’t question the part about being sifted like wheat by Satan; rather he questions the validity in that he will not fully come through for Jesus. He doesn’t believe he will falter in the least, and that makes him better than the others. But Peter wasn’t the only one. In the other gospel accounts it says all the other disciples said the same.

- A. Peter promises Jesus that he is ready follow Jesus to prison and to death.
- B. Jesus tells Peter that he won’t even last the night. Not only is Peter not able to make good on what he said, Jesus poignantly says that Peter will not even acknowledge that he knows Him. And after Peter denies Jesus three times that night he hears the rooster crow and weeps bitterly.

Again we can see Peter’s insight in his first epistle concerning humility. He says in 1 Peter 5:

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.”

Peter is not saying this because he has heard about this. He knows it because he has experienced it.

So what do I mean by “only transformed people can follow Jesus”? What I mean is this: that in order to follow Jesus we need to be transformed from the inside out. This applies to following Jesus in the extraordinary ways like what Peter promised, but it also applies to following Jesus in our daily lives. Like Peter I so often think that I can muster the will to do what I think God wants me to do, like Peter I consistently make promises to God, but also like Peter I inevitably fall short. Maybe you have had similar experiences. If a rooster crowed every time I broke a promise to God I would live a noisy life. But as we trust in Jesus we begin to be transformed.

What is this transformation that I am talking about? It is being transformed into the image of Christ Himself, and this transformation is both instantaneous and progressive. It is instantaneous in that as we come to faith in Christ, as we trust in Him we are given a new nature and accredited with all of His righteousness. **It is progressive in that it is a work of the Holy Spirit, whereby He continually renews and transforms us into the likeness of Christ, enabling us to keep on growing in grace and to keep on perfecting our holiness.**¹ The way we are

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transformed (that is, the way we grow in Christ) is the same way we are originally saved by responding to God's grace and mercy.

So what do we make of Peter? It is probably common to think that if Peter would have just backed up what he said, there wouldn't be an issue. However either way Peter was in the wrong and that is because it was all based on self-reliance. But the irony of the whole conversation is that both Peter and Jesus were right. Of course we more than expect Jesus to be right, that Peter would deny him three times, but Peter was right, too. For Peter would go on to serve Jesus in a mighty way, preaching the sermon at Pentecost, converting thousands, and being the prominent leader of the early church. He would show humility when confronted in an area where he was wrong. He would be imprisoned a number of times and would eventually be martyred for following Jesus. Peter is told of his future martyrdom by the risen Lord in John 21:18-19 as Jesus reinstates him:

¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

It was not Peter's promise to Jesus that made him able to follow Jesus through trials, prison, and to death. Rather it was Jesus' promise to Peter that made him able to follow Him. Jesus' prayer is that Peter's faith would not fail and that Peter would turn and strengthen his brothers. But it was not only that promise but it was all of the promises that Jesus made to Peter. And that is how it is for you and for me as well.

We are able to follow Jesus like Peter by believing the promises that Jesus has made to us, that He has lived perfectly in our place fulfilling all of the requirements of God and paying for all of our sin on the cross. Because of this we are promised that we have eternal life, and we are promised that no one can snatch us from the Lord's hand. We are promised that just as Christ conquered death and rose from the grave we will also, and we are promised that we will have the power of the Holy Spirit and that Jesus will be with us always until the end of the age. When we believe the promises found in the gospel it changes everything.

It literally changes us. If you want to follow Jesus, these promises are for you, whether this would be the first time you really believe them or the millionth. But following Jesus is a long road and transformation takes a lifetime as we continually struggle with letting go of our self-reliance and learning to fully rely on Him.

When we focus our faith on what we can or will do for God rather than what He has done for us **through the person and work of Jesus Christ**, we inevitably fail like Peter did. If you happen to find yourself failing miserably like him, and like he and I so often do; Peter gives us this encouragement as he closes his teaching in his first epistle, chapter 5 verse 10.

¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.